

MALVASIA ISTRIANA

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BACKGROUND

Malvasia Istriana (pronounced mal-VAH-zia is-tree-AHN-a) originated in the Istria peninsula of northwest Croatia and spread down the coast to Dalmatia. It is chiefly grown in Istria where it is the main variety of any colour, and the second-most important in Croatia overall with 3410 ha in 2009. In northeast Italy there are now just 300 ha or so at present, well down from the 4000 ha in the 1970s. Malvasia Istriana is just one of many varieties known as 'Malvasia' that are grown from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. However, these varieties do not have a common origin and may be genetically very distinct. Malvasia Istriana is genetically close to Malvasia di Lipari (syn. Malvasia di Sardegna), Malvasia Bianca Lunga and Malvasia Nera di Brindisi, but does not have a close relationship with the widely planted Malvasia Bianca di Candia (in Italy) or Malvasia Bianca di Piemonte (in California). In the past Malvasia Istriana was thought to have a Greek origin—but the genetic research does not support this proposition. Synonyms include Malvazija Istarska (Croatia), Malvasia del Carso and Malvasia Friulana (north-east Italy) and Poljšakica Drnovk (Slovenia). There are at least six wine producers of Malvasia Istriana in Australian regions including Tasmania, Sunbury, Heathcote and Adelaide Hills.



VITICULTURE

Malvasia Istriana is said to be easy to grow. Budburst is mid-season to late and maturity is mid-season. Growth habit is semi-erect and vigour is high. Bunches are medium to large, well-filled and berries medium to large, yellowish with thick skin, juicy flesh and neutral taste. Yield is moderate and regular with some millerandage in cool seasons. Cane pruning is most common. Susceptibility to diseases is average with the exception of powdery mildew to which it is very susceptible. It has good tolerance of cold winters, early frosts and windy sites. Good canopy management and yield control are necessary in most locations.

WINE

Acidity is moderate and alcohol can be potentially high. Wines vary considerably in style from light and fresh to full-bodied, soft and luscious (somewhat analogous to Pinot G). Malvasia Istriana wines tend to be fresher than wines from most other 'Malvasias'—but some Istrian examples can have excessive phenolics due to long skin contact. There is some clonal variation in terms of expression of citrus, apple, muscat and minty notes while a distinctive 'honey-like tang' seems to be common to all.

For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling (viticulture@awri.com.au; tel. 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of the Research to Practice program on Alternative Varieties in your region.